

**TESTIMONY OF RADHIKA FOX
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**BEFORE THE
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT**

July 13, 2023

Good afternoon, Chairman Rouzer, Ranking Member Napolitano, and Members of the Subcommittee. I am Radhika Fox and I have the great honor of serving as the Assistant Administrator for Water at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). I am grateful for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss EPA's budget request for water programs for Fiscal Year 2024, and to highlight the work we are doing, stewarding these precious taxpayer resources, on behalf of the American people.

Clean and safe water is an essential foundation to protect human health, to ensure thriving ecosystems, and to drive a strong economy. Just over 50 years ago, this Committee wrote and shepherded through Congress the Clean Water Act with broad bipartisan support, establishing the goal that our Nation's treasured waters be fishable and swimmable, and giving to EPA the authority and responsibility to address pollution, protect wetlands and water resources, and improve wastewater and stormwater infrastructure. These goals remain central to President Biden's, Administrator Regan's, and my own values, and to our approach to implementing all of our Clean Water Act programs. Although we have made immense progress to achieve these goals, there is much work that remains to be done. We continue to make great strides to protect the integrity of our Nation's waters, but many remain polluted or threatened. So, too, have we made progress in improving our Nation's clean water infrastructure, yet too many people in this country still lack access to adequate drinking water, sanitation, and stormwater infrastructure. That is why in FY 2024, the President's budget requests nearly \$6 billion for EPA's water programs – just under half of the Agency's total \$12.1 billion request. These resources will enable the

Agency to continue our work with federal, Tribal, state, local, and nongovernmental partners to provide clean and safe water for all communities, advance water quality science, and protect America’s waters for today’s and future generations.

Before turning to our budget requests, I want to take a moment to recognize and express my profound gratitude to the incredible career staff in the EPA’s Office of Water, and in our Regional Water Divisions. Their dedication, technical expertise, and hard work are delivering on this Administration’s promise to protect our Nation’s waters and rebuild America’s water infrastructure.

Achieve Clean and Safe Water through Investing in America’s Water Infrastructure

When I was last invited to appear before this committee to discuss our FY 2022 budget, I highlighted the promise of what was, at the time, a proposal for more than \$50 billion in the then-Bipartisan Infrastructure Framework. Thanks to President Biden’s leadership, and bipartisan action in Congress, that framework is now the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, and we are delivering on that promise for every person in this country.

At EPA, we are delivering on that promise by investing in America – as the President says, from the bottom up and the middle out – and by upgrading and renewing our Nation’s water infrastructure. We’re working to ensure that no community, however small, rural, or disadvantaged, is left out. As you know, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law includes more than \$50 billion for our Nation’s water infrastructure – and an unprecedented \$13 billion of it will flow through our Clean Water State Revolving loan funds. These investments will play a critical role in reversing decades of underinvestment, disinvestment, and neglect. Aging wastewater and stormwater systems dot our counties and states. Many of them are still addressing 20th century challenges, some even using 19th century pipes, while striving to meet the pivotal issues that will define the 21st century, from climate change to per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS).

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As we look to FY 2024, we will continue our close partnership with states to implement the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and look to build on that success with the President’s budget. The Budget provides more than \$4 billion for water infrastructure, an increase of \$1 billion over the 2023 enacted level – including more than \$1.6 billion to the Clean Water State Revolving Fund. The Budget also provides resources for additional infrastructure grant and loan programs administered by EPA, such as \$280 million to the Sewer Overflow and Stormwater Reuse program. In addition to creating hundreds of thousands of good-paying American jobs, these resources would advance efforts to upgrade wastewater, stormwater, and drinking water infrastructure nationwide, with a focus on underserved and small rural communities that need these resources most.

While it lies outside the jurisdiction of this committee, I will also note that, to further the President’s goal of replacing all lead pipes within the next decade, the Budget proposes \$219 million for two grant programs dedicated to remediating lead contamination in water— EPA’s Reducing Lead in Drinking Water grant program and EPA’s Lead Testing in Schools grant program.

Also included in this budget is \$80 million to support the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA) loan program. Earlier this year, EPA celebrated the closing of its 100th WIFIA loan. Since its establishment in 2014, this EPA program has helped communities leverage more than \$18 billion in credit assistance to finance more than \$38 billion in water infrastructure projects around the Nation. By providing lower-than-market interest rates, WIFIA loans for these projects have saved communities – like Pflugerville, TX and Los Angeles, CA – more than \$6 billion, which can be used for additional infrastructure investment and to keep rates affordable for families and small businesses. These WIFIA-financed projects have created more than 130,000 jobs and benefited more than 57 million people, demonstrating that WIFIA credit assistance is an effective tool to help address critical water infrastructure needs.

Level the Playing Field for Communities through Technical Assistance

We also know that to protect public health and to ensure clean water across America, we need to ensure that ALL communities benefit from these investments. Too many disadvantaged communities across rural, suburban, and urban areas have not received their fair share of funding. We can and will do better. That’s why we are standing up an unprecedented technical assistance effort to level the playing field for communities who have too often been left behind. In the last year, we’ve committed \$150 million to provide technical assistance through our 29 Environmental Finance Centers around the country, and launched two partnership initiatives – the Closing the Wastewater Access Gap initiative and our Lead Service Line Accelerators initiative. These efforts will develop capacity to unlock investments in underserved communities, and our FY 2024 budget request will help us expand on those efforts.

For example, in addition to continuing to provide resources to support communities through our Environmental Finance Centers, the budget also funds all of the technical assistance and targeted grant programs from the Drinking Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Act (DWWIA) of 2021, which was authorized in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. These include an \$18 million dedicated technical assistance grant program for wastewater treatment works, a \$10 million Small and Medium Publicly Owned Treatment Works Circuit Rider Program, a \$25 million Clean Water Infrastructure Resilience and Sustainability Grant Program, and a \$20 million Wastewater Efficiency Grant Pilot Program. Strategic technical assistance will be central to the legacy that the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law will deliver for the American People.

Protect America’s Treasured Waters through Place-Based Investments

From the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico, and from Albemarle Sound to Puget Sound, the United States is home to treasured water bodies of ecological, cultural, and economic significance. With partnerships that span across federal agencies; state, Tribal, and local governments; and interstate and non-governmental organizations, these financial assistance programs leverage federal resources to achieve outsize impacts for communities across America’s Atlantic, Pacific, Gulf, Caribbean, and inland coasts. The Budget invests nearly \$715 million in our Geographic, National Estuary, and other place-

based and coastal programs, which deliver technical and financial assistance to address critical – and locally identified – watershed priorities. These resources will help clean up pollution, reverse habitat loss, build coastal resilience to storms and other climate impacts, and protect culturally and economically important fisheries and waters beloved by communities across America.

Provide Funding and Assistance to States to Mitigate Pollution and Improve Water Quality

The Budget provides \$493 million in financial support through Categorical Grant Programs to EPA’s Tribal, state, and local partners to support their efforts in implementing key provisions of the Clean Water Act. Within this amount, \$279 million is provided to the Section 106 Grants Program, an increase of more than \$42 million from the FY 2023 enacted budget. These resources would fund state, interstate, and Tribal water pollution control programs to assess and mitigate pollution, and expand and implement water quality programs to protect and restore our Nation’s rivers, lakes, streams, and wetlands. The Budget also includes \$189 million for the Section 319 Grants Program, which is an important tool to reduce nonpoint source pollution and restore impaired waterbodies to meet water quality standards, and protect clean waters.

Accelerate Efforts to Protect People from PFAS Pollution

In FY 2024, EPA will continue to work across environmental programs to advance agency efforts to tackle PFAS pollution. As part of the President’s commitment to addressing PFAS pollution, and consistent with EPA’s PFAS Strategic Roadmap, the FY 2024 Budget provides approximately \$170 million for EPA’s overall PFAS efforts, including work to increase our understanding of PFAS and their human health and ecological effects; minimize PFAS entering our Nation’s waters; and protect people and aquatic life from these chemicals. The Budget requests almost \$60 million to EPA in additional funding for water programs to enable the Agency to move more quickly on policy and regulatory actions across relevant statutory authorities. This includes not only significant Clean Water Act efforts within this Committee’s jurisdiction – such as making critical progress on Effluent Limitations Guidelines for

industries that discharge PFAS – but also the Agency’s recent proposal under the Safe Drinking Water Act to set enforceable limits for six PFAS in drinking water. If finalized, this rule will prevent thousands of deaths and tens of thousands of avoidable illnesses. EPA will also continue its efforts in FY 2024 to develop analytical methods, drinking water health advisories, toxicity values, and risk assessments, as well as risk communication and other tools to support states, tribes, and localities in managing PFAS in their communities. This funding complements and informs the implementation of the nearly \$10 billion in Bipartisan Infrastructure Law resources dedicated to addressing PFAS and other emerging contaminants.

Ensure Clean Water and Healthy Ecosystems Across the Nation

We are also working to ensure that EPA fulfills its statutory responsibilities, included under the Clean Water Act, to protect the health of the American people and the integrity of our waters. As we do so, we are committed to grounding our regulatory and rulemaking approaches on a foundation of science, the law, and partnerships with our state and Tribal co-regulators – and informed by robust stakeholder engagement.

The Budget includes \$268 million for the Surface Water Protection Program, an increase of \$43.5 million over the FY 2023 enacted level, to support efforts to protect, improve, and restore the quality of our Nation’s coastal waters, rivers, lakes, wetlands, and streams.

Conclusion

Our ability to achieve these goals – ensuring clean and safe water, protecting water resources and wetlands, and improving our Nation’s wastewater and stormwater infrastructure – will be determined by the strength of our partnerships. None of these goals will be possible without strong collaboration between the Executive and Legislative branches. That is why I am so honored to join you today. Once again, Chairman Rouzer, Ranking Member Napolitano, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the FY 2024 President’s Budget for the EPA’s National Water Program. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.